

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

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E.O. 11652: N/A
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SUBJECT: NCU ELECTIONS MAY 18

REF: SEOUL 2310 (DTG 220827Z MAR 78)

1. SUMMARY: KOREA'S ELECTORAL COLLEGE WAS ELECTED THURSDAY
IN ORDERLY, NON-PARTISAN VOTING. ROKG IS SATISFIED WITH
REPORTED 79 PERCENT VOTER TURN-OUT, SUBSTANTIALLY MORE THAN
IN 1972. ELECTION FOR PRESIDENT MAY BE HELD IN JULY OR
AUGUST. END SUMMARY.

2. ROK HELD ELECTIONS FOR SECOND CROP OF DELEGATES TO NATIONAL
COUNCIL FOR UNIFICATION (NCU). BODY OF PRESIDENTIAL ELECTORS
ON MAY 18. FROM ALL EVIDENCE AVAILABLE TO EMBASSY, ELECTIONS
WERE QUIET AND ORDERLY, AS ROKG HAD FERVENTLY HOPED. BECAUSE
OF NON-PARTISAN NATURE OF CAMPAIGNING AND LARGE NUMBERS
INVOLVED (2,583 DELEGATES TO BE ELECTED, IN 1,665 PRECINCTS),
AND UNIVERSAL ASSUMPTION THAT NCU WILL DUTIFULLY RE-ELECT
PRESIDENT PARK WHEN TIME COMES, GOVERNMENT'S GREAT CONCERN
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IN PAST FEW WEEKS HAS BEEN TO ASSURE ADEQUATE VOTER TURN-
OUT, AT LEAST MEETING, OR IF POSSIBLE EXCEEDING, THE
70.4 PERCENT VOTING RATE OF ONLY PREVIOUS NCU ELECTION
(IN 1972).

3. MEDIA ON THURSDAY AND FRIDAY GAVE HEAVY PLAY TO
ACHIEVEMENT OF THIS GOAL: FINAL OFFICIAL VOTING RATION

WAS 78.95 PERCENT IN THE 1429 DISTRICTS (OUT OF 1665 TOTAL) WHERE SEATS WERE CONTESTED. MANY KOREANS HAVE REMARKED ON UNUSUAL STEP THAT ROKG TOOK IN HAVING SEOUL SCHOOL CHILDREN URGE THEIR PARENTS TO VOTE. (ONE MAN, IDENTIFYING HIMSELF AS A GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEE, ANONYMOUSLY COMPLAINED TO HIS OPPOSITION ASSEMBLYMAN OF HIS SON'S HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT TO REPORT TO HIS SCHOOL ON FRIDAY ON WHICH OF THOSE ELIGIBLE IN HIS HOME HAD AND HAD NOT VOTED).

4. ALTHOUGH ROKG MADE OSTENTATIOUS SHOW OF FORBIDDING POLITICAL PARTIES TO UNDERTAKE ANY ACTIVITY WHICH MIGHT BE CONSTRUED AS ATTEMPTING TO INFLUENCE OUTCOME OF ELECTION, STORIES ABOUND OF ELECTIONEERING BY THE NCU CANDIDATES THEMSELVES WHICH EXCEEDED THE STRICT LIMITS LAID DOWN BY LAW (REFTEL). NONETHELESS, HOME MINISTER KIM CH'I-YOL DESCRIBED ELECTION AS "CLEANEST IN KOREA'S HISTORY".

5. STATISTICS: ALTHOUGH 5,577 CANDIDATES ORIGINALLY REGISTERED (FOR A COMPETITION RATIO OF 2.16 TO ONE), 126 OF THEM WITHDREW AND THE REGISTRATION OF ANOTHER 35 WAS DECLARED INVALID, DECREASING THE RATIO TO 2.09 TO ONE. LACK OF EXCESS CANDIDATES IN 236 PRECINCTS ENABLED REGIONAL ELECTION MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES TO ANNOUNCE ON MORNING OF MAY 18 THE UNOPPOSED ELECTION LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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OF 332 CANDIDATES. ALTHOUGH COMPLETE RESULTS ARE NOT EXPECTED UNTIL LATE MAY 19, SUBSTANTIALLY COMPLETE RETURNS SHOW THAT MOST OF WELL-KNOWN CANDIDATES AND MANY INCUMBENTS WERE ELECTED.

6. PARTY REACTIONS: RULING DRP'S STATEMENT ON ELECTIONS WELCOMED CALM AND ORDERLY ATMOSPHERE IN WHICH ELECTION PROCEEDED, AND BOTH DRP AND YUJONG-HOE COMMENTED THAT RESULT SHOWED "FIRMER ESTABLISHMENT" OF YUSIN SYSTEM. OPPOSITION NDP CRITICIZED ELECTION SYSTEM FOR ITS "CONTRADICTIONS" IN EXCLUDING PARTICIPATION BY POLITICAL PARTIES AND ANNOUNCED IT WAS DISCUSSING WHETHER TO ISSUE A WHITE PAPER CONTAINING EXAMPLES OF VIOLATIONS OF ELECTION LAW.

7. TONGA ILBO RAN INSIDE-PAGE PIECE BY POLITICAL REPORTER YI KYONG-CHAE FINDING REASONS FOR LARGE VOTER TURN-OUT IN (A) ENHANCED VALUE SEEN IN POSITION OF NCU DELEGATE, (B) "NOSTALGIA FOR POLITICS" AND (C) ADMINISTRATIONS'S STRENUOUS EFFORTS TO TURN OUT VOTE, BECAUSE OF ITS INTERPRETATION OF TURN-OUT AS INDICATION OF DEGREE OF SUPPORT FOR YUSIN SYSTEM. YI, AS DID OTHER OBSERVERS,

ALSO NOTED THAT AUTHORITIES CLOSED THEIR EYES TO MANY
INSTANCES OF ELECTIONEERING VIOLATIONS, PRESUMABLY IN
ORDER NOT TO CHILL THE ELECTION MOOD TOO MUCH.

8. NEW NCU DELEGATES WILL TAKE OFFICE JULY FIRST.
ELECTION FOR PRESIDENT MAY BE CALLED ANYTIME BETWEEN
THEN AND NOVEMBER 26, BUT NEWSPAPER SPECULATION HIGHLIGHTS
JULY-TO-AUGUST PERIOD. SNEIDER

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